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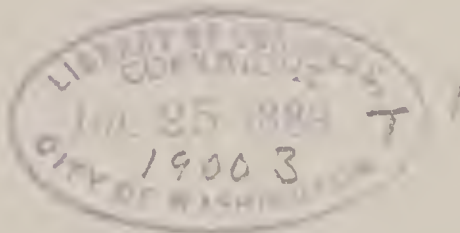
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# THE INDEPENDENT IN POLITICS

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BY

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL  
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By JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

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## THE INDEPENDENT IN POLITICS.

I HAVE not been so much surprised as perhaps I ought to have been to learn that, in the opinion of some of our leading politicians and of many of our newspapers, men of scholarly minds are *ipso facto* debarred from forming any judgment on public affairs; or, if they should be so unscrupulous as to do so, that they must at least refrain from communicating it to their fellow-citizens. One eminent gentleman has even gone so far as to sneer at school books as sources of information. If he had a chance, he would perhaps take a hint from what is fabled of the Caliph Omar and burn our libraries, because if they contained doctrine not to be found in his speeches they would be harmful, while if the doctrine, judged by that test, were orthodox, they would be useless. Books have hitherto been supposed to be armories of human experience, where we might equip ourselves for the battles of opinion while we had yet vigor and hopefulness enough left to make our weapons of some avail.

Through books the youngest of us could converse with more generations than Nestor; could attain that ripened judgment which is the privilege of old age without old age's drawbacks and diminutions. This has been the opinion of many men, not reckoned the least wise in their generation. But they were mistaken, it seems. I looked round with saddened wonder at the costly apparatus of schoolhouses

provided by our ancestors to the avowed end that "good learning might not cease from among us," at the libraries and universities by the founding of which our rich men seek to atone for their too rapidly agglomerated wealth, and said to myself: "What a wasteful blunder we have been making!" Then it suddenly occurred to me that this putting of culture under the ban might be, after all, but a more subtle application of the American System, as it is called, which would exclude all foreign experience, as well as the raw material of it, till we had built up an experience of our own at the same cost of mistake and retribution which is its unvarying price. This might indeed flatter my pride of country, though it left me, as Grumio says, to "return unexperienced to my grave."

But if we are forbidden to seek knowledge in books, what is the alternative? I could think of none unless it were immediate inspiration. It is true that I could not see that any authentic marks of it were revealed by the advocates of this novel theory. They keep their secret remarkably well. No doubt inspiration, like money, is a very handy thing to have, and if I should ever see an advertisement of any shop where it could be bought, even at second-hand, I would lay in a stock of it forthwith. It is more convenient than knowledge, for, like certain articles of wearing apparel, it is adjustable to the prevailing taste of the moment in any part of the country. It seems more studious of the traditions and prejudices of the multitude than the utterances of Isaiah were wont to be. I must frankly confess at the outset that I come to you wholly unprovided with this precious commodity. I must also admit that I am a book man, that I am old-fashioned enough to have read many books, and that I hope to read many more. I find them easier reading than some other kinds of printed matter. I appear before you, therefore, with some diffidence, and shall make my excuses in the words of an elder who in my youth was accounted



wise. Lord Bacon, a man versed both in affairs and in books, says: "And for the matter of policy and government, that learning should rather hurt than enable thereunto, is a thing very improbable. We see it is accounted an error to commit a natural body to empiric physicians who commonly have a few pleasing receipts whereupon they are confident and adventurous, but know neither the causes of diseases nor the constitutions of patients, nor peril of accidents, nor the true method of cures; we see it is a like error to rely upon advocates or lawyers who are only men of practice and not grounded in their books, who are many times easily surprised when matter falleth out beyond their experience to the prejudice of the causes they handle; so by like reason it cannot be but a matter of doubtful consequence if States be managed by empiric statesmen not well mingled with men grounded in learning. But, contrariwise, it is almost without an instance to the contrary that ever any government was disastrous that was in the hands of learned governors." He goes on to say that "It hath been ordinary with politique men to extenuate and disable learned men by the name of *pedants*." Practical politicians, as they call themselves, have the same habit still, only that they have substituted *doctrinaire* for *pedant* as the term of reproach. Now the true and mischievous doctrinaire is he who insists that facts shall accommodate themselves to preconceived theory, and the truly practical man he who would deduce theory from the amplest possible comparison and correlation of facts, in other words, from recorded experience. I think it is already beginning to be apparent on which side of the questions which have been brought to the front by the President's Message the doctrinaires are to be found. We all know the empiric physicians who are confident and adventurous with their few pleasing receipts.

Your committee asked me to give a title to such sugges-

tions as I might find occasion to make this evening, and I took "The Place of the Independent in Politics" as the first that occurred to me. But I confess that I partake of Mr. Walter Shandy's superstition about names, and shall not allow myself to be circumscribed and scanted of elbow-room by the appellation I have chosen. I prefer general to personal politics. I allude to this in order that, in any thing I shall say here, I may not be suspected to have one party more than another in my mind. I am not blind to the fact that Truth always seems to have gone to school to the prophet Nathan and to intend a personal application. It is perhaps her prime virtue as a stimulant of thought, for thought is helpful in proportion as it more and more becomes disengaged from self, and this cannot happen till some sharp reminder make us conscious of that plausible accomplice in our thinking and in the doing which follows from it. Though I shall not evade present questions when they come naturally in my way, I shall choose rather to indicate why there is a necessity that the Independent should have a place in politics than to dictate where that place should be. I think that something I wrote forty years ago, if you will allow me to quote it, will define my notion of what is meant by an Independent with sufficient exactness. I then said, and I have not changed my mind :

I honor the man who is ready to sink  
Half his present repute for the freedom to think,  
And, when he has thought, be his cause strong or weak,  
Will risk t'other half for the freedom to speak,  
Caring naught for what vengeance the mob has in store,  
Let that mob be the upper ten thousand or lower.

Four years ago I was called upon to deliver an address in Birmingham, and chose for my theme "Democracy." In that place I felt it incumbent on me to dwell on the good points and favorable aspects of democracy as I had seen

them practically illustrated in my native land. I chose rather that my discourse should suffer through inadequacy than run the risk of seeming to forget what Burke calls "that salutary prejudice called our country," and that obligation which forbids one to discuss family affairs before strangers. But here among ourselves it is clearly the duty of whoever loves his country to be watchful of whatever weaknesses and perils there may be in the practical working of a system never before set in motion under such favorable auspices or on so large a scale. I have called them weaknesses and perils in the system, but it would be idle to discuss them if I did not believe that they were not so properly results of the system, as of abuses in the operation of it, due in part to changed conditions, in part to a thoughtless negligence which experience and thought will in due time rectify. I believe that no other method of conducting the public affairs of men is so capable of sloughing off its peccant parts as ours, because in no other are the forces of life at once so intense and so universally distributed.

Before we turn to the consideration of politics as we see them in practice, let us think for a moment what, when properly understood, they really are. In their least comprehensive definition politics are an art which concerns itself about the national housekeeping, about the immediate interests and workaday wants, the income and the outgo of the people. They have to deal with practical questions as they arise and grow pressing. Even on this humbler plane they may well have an attraction for the finest intellects and the greatest abilities in a country where public opinion is supreme, for they can perform their function only by persuading, convincing, and thus governing the minds of men. The most trivial question acquires dignity when it touches the well-being or rouses the passions of many millions. But there is a higher and wider sense in which politics may fairly

be ranked as a science. When they rise to this level we call them statesmanship. The statesman applies himself to the observation and recording of certain causes which lead constantly to certain effects, and is thus able to formulate general laws for the guidance of his own judgment and for the conduct of affairs. He is not so much interested in the devices by which men *may* be influenced, as about how they *ought* to be influenced, not so much about how men's passions and prejudices may be utilized for a momentary advantage to himself or his party, as about how they may be hindered from doing a permanent harm to the commonwealth. He trains himself to discern evils in their causes that he may forewarn if he cannot prevent, and that he may not be taken unawares by the long bill of damages they are sure to bring in, and always at the least convenient moment. He seeks and finds in the moral world the weather-signs of the actual world. He strives to see and know things as they really are and as they are related to each other; as they really are and therefore always must be, his vision undeflected by the cross-lights of transitory circumstance, his judgment undisturbed by the clamor of passionate and changeful opinion.

That this conception of statesmanship is not fanciful the writings and speeches of Burke are ample proof. Many great and many acute minds had speculated upon politics from Aristotle's time downwards, but Burke was the first to illuminate the subject of his observation and thought with the electric light of imagination. He turned its penetrating ray upon what seemed the confused and wavering cloud-chaos of man's nature and man's experience, and found there the indication at least, if not the scheme, of a divine order. The result is that his works are as full of prophecy, some of it already fulfilled, some of it in course of fulfilment, as they are of wisdom. And this is because for him human nature was always the text and history the comment.



There are no more pregnant lessons in the science of how to look at things so as to see them and into them, of how to distinguish what is perennial from what is deciduous in a political question, than Burke's two speeches on "Taxation of the American Colonies" and on "Conciliation with America." For if his imagination was fervid, it served but to warm his understanding till that grew ductile enough to take a perfect impression of fact. If the one made generalization easy, the other, in testing the generalization, compelled him always to make account of the special diagnosis of the case in hand. If one would know the difference between a statesman and a politician, let him compare Burke's view of the American troubles with that of Dr. Johnson, a man of that headstrong common-sense which sees with absorbing, one might almost say blinding, clearness whatever comes within its immediate field of vision, but is conscious of nothing beyond it. The question for Burke was not whether Taxation were Tyranny, but whether the Americans would think it so. Here was a case in which expediency was at one with wisdom.

But I am happy in being able to find an illustration nearer home. Never did three men show more clearly the quality of true statesmanship or render a more precious service to their country than Senators Fessenden, Trumbull, and Grimes, when they dared to act independently of party in the impeachment case against President Johnson. They saved us from the creeping paralysis which is now gradually benumbing the political energies of France. Nay, while we were yet in the gristle, we produced statesmen, not, indeed, endowed with Burke's genius, though fairly comparable with him in breadth of view, and sometimes his superiors in practical sagacity. But I think there is a growing doubt whether we are not ceasing to produce them, whether perhaps we are not losing the power to produce them. The tricks of

management are more and more superseding the science of government. Our methods force the growth of two kinds of politicians to the crowding out of all other varieties—him who is called *practical*, and him of the corner grocery. The one trades in that counterfeit of public opinion which the other manufactures. Both work in the dark, and there is need that some one should turn the light of his policeman's lantern on their doings. I believe that there is as much of the raw material of statesmanship among us as ever there was, but the duties levied by the local rings of majority-manufacturers are so high as to prohibit its entrance into competition with the protected article. Could we only have a travelling exhibition of our Bosses, and say to the American people: "Behold, the shapers of your national destiny!" A single despot would be cheaper, and probably better looking. It is a natural impulse to turn away one's eyes from these fleshflies that fatten on the sores of our body-politic and plant there the eggs of their disgustful and infectious progeny. But it is the lesson of the day that a yielding to this repulsion by the intelligent and refined is a mainly efficient cause of the evil and must be overcome, at whatever cost of selfish ease and æsthetic comfort, ere the evil can be hopefully dealt with.

It is admitted on all hands that matters have been growing worse for the last twenty years, as it is the nature of evil to do. It is publicly asserted that admission to the Senate of the United States is a marketable thing. I know not whether this be true or not, but is it not an ominous sign of the times that this has been asserted and generally believed to be possible, if not probable? It is notorious that important elections are decided by votes bought with money, or by the more mischievous equivalent of money, places in the public service. What is even more disheartening, the tone of a large part of the press in regard to this

state of things is cynical, or even jocular. And how often do we not read in our morning paper that such and such a local politician is dictating the choice of delegates to a Nominating Convention, or manipulating them after they are chosen? So often that we at last take it as a matter of course, as something beyond our power to modify or control, like the weather, at which we may grumble, if we like, but cannot help. We should not tolerate a packed jury which is to decide on the fate of a single man, yet we are content to leave the life of the nation at the mercy of a packed Convention. We allow ourselves to be bilked of our rights and thwarted in our duties as citizens by men in whose hands their very henchmen would be the last to trust any thing more valuable than their reputation. Pessimists tell us these things are the natural incidents and necessary consequences of representative government under Democratic conditions, that we have drawn the wine and must drink it. If I believed this to be so, I should not be speaking here to-night. Parties refuse to see, or, if they see, to look into vicious methods which help them to a majority, and each is thus estopped from sincere protest against the same methods when employed by the other. The people of the Northern States thought four years' war not too dear a price to prevent half their country being taken from them. But the practices of which I have been speaking are slowly and surely filching from us the whole of our country—all, at least, that made it the best to live in and the easiest to die for. If parties will not look after their own drainage and ventilation, there must be people who will do it for them, who will cry out without ceasing till their fellow-citizens are aroused to the danger of infection. This duty can be done only by men dissociated from the interests of party. The Independents have undertaken it, and with God's help will carry it through. A moral purpose multiplies us by ten

as it multiplied the early Abolitionists. They emancipated the negro ; and we mean to emancipate the respectable white man.

It is time for lovers of their country to consider how much of the success of our experiment in Democracy has been due to such favorable conditions as never before concurred to make such an attempt plausible ; whether those conditions have changed and are still changing for the worse ; how far we have been accessories in this degeneration, if such there be, and how far it is in our power with the means furnished by the very instruments of destruction to stay its advance and to repair its ravages. Till within a few years of our Civil War, every thing conduced to our measuring the success of our institutions by the evidence of our outward prosperity, and to our seeing the future in rose-color. The hues of our dawn had scarcely faded from the sky. Men were still living who had seen the face and heard the voice of the most august personage in our history, and of others scarce less august than he. The traditions of our founders were fresh. Our growth in wealth and power was without precedent. We had been so fortunate that we had come to look upon our luck as partly due to our own merits and partly to our form of government. When we met together it was to felicitate each other on our superiority to the rest of mankind. Our ears caught from behind the horizon the muffled thunders of war, only to be lulled as with the murmurs of the surf on a far-off shore. We heard of revolutions, but for us Fortune forgot to turn her wheel. This was what may be called the Fourth of July period of our history. Among the peoples of the earth we were the little Jack Horner. We had put in our thumb and pulled out a plum, and the rest of mankind thought that we were never tired of saying : "What a good boy am I !" Here is a picture of our growth, drawn by a friendly yet impartial



hand: "Nothing in the history of mankind is like their progress. For my part, I never cast an eye on their flourishing commerce and their cultivated and commodious life but they seem to me rather ancient nations grown to perfection through a long series of fortunate events and a train of successful industry accumulating wealth in many centuries than the colonies of yesterday. . . . Your children do not grow faster from infancy to manhood than they spread from families to communities and from villages to nations." But for a certain splendor of style these words seem to be of yesterday, so pertinent are they still. They were uttered in the British Parliament more than a year before the battle of Lexington, by Edmund Burke. There is no exaggeration in them. They are a simple statement of fact. Burke, with his usual perspicacity, saw and stated one and a chief cause of this unprecedented phenomenon. He tells us that the colonies had made this marvellous growth because, "through a wise and salutary neglect, a generous nature has been suffered to take her own way to perfection." But by that "wise and salutary neglect" he meant freedom from the petty and short-sighted meddlesomeness of a paternal government; he meant being left to follow untrammelled the instincts of our genius under the guidance of our energy. The same causes have gone on ever since working the same marvels. Those marvels have been due in part to our political system. But there were other circumstances tending to stimulate personal energy and enterprise, especially land to be had for the taking, and free trade over a larger share of the earth's surface peopled by thriving and intelligent communities than had ever been enjoyed elsewhere. I think, however, that there was one factor more potent than any other, or than all others together. Before we broke away from the mother country politically, a century and a half of that "wise neglect" of which Burke spoke had thoroughly made over again and

Americanized all the descendants of the earlier settlers, and these formed the great bulk of the population. The same process was rapidly going on in the more recent immigrants. So thorough had this process been that many, perhaps most, of the refugees who, during or after the Revolutionary War, went to England, or home, as they fondly called it, found themselves out of place and unhappy there. The home they missed was that humane equality, not of condition or station, but of being and opportunity, which by some benign influence of the place had overcome them here, like a summer cloud, without their special wonder. Yet they felt the comfort of it as of an air wholesome to breathe. I more than suspect that it was the absence of this inestimable property of the moral atmosphere that made them aliens in every other land, and convinced them that an American can no more find another country than a second mother. This equality had not then been proclaimed as a right; it had been incorporated in no constitution, but was there by the necessity of the case—a gift of the sky and of the forest, as truly there as it now is in that great West, whose history was so admirably treated by Senator Hoar a few days ago, and whose singular good-fortune it has been that no disparities except those of nature's making have ever been known there. Except in the cities of the seaboard, where the habits of the Old World had to some extent been kept alive by intercourse and importation, the defecation of the body politic and the body social of all purely artificial and arbitrary distinctions had been going on silently and surely among the masses of the people for generations. This was true (in a more limited sense) even of communities where slavery existed, for as that was based on complexion, every white, no matter what his condition, belonged to the privileged class, just as in Hungary every Magyar was a noble. This was the American novelty, no bantling of theory, no

fruit of forethought, no trophy of insurgent violence, but a pure evolution from the nature of man in a perfectly free medium. The essential triumph was achieved in this tacit recognition of a certain privilege and adequacy in mere manhood, and Democracy may be said to have succeeded before it was accepted as doctrine or embodied as a political fact. Our ancestors sought a new country. What they found was a new condition of mind. It is more than questionable whether the same conditions in as favorable combination of time and place will ever occur again, whether equality, so wholesome when a social evolution, as I have described it, may not become harmful as a sudden gift in the form of dogma, may not indeed prove dangerous when interpreted and applied politically by millions of newcomers alien to our traditions, unsteadied by lifelong training and qualifying associations. We have great and thus far well-warranted faith in the digestive and assimilative powers of our system, but may not these be overtaxed?

The theory of equality was as old, among men of English blood, as Jack Cade's rebellion, but it was not practically conceived even by the very men who asserted it. Here on the edge of the forest, where civilized man was brought face to face again with nature and taught to rely mainly on himself, mere manhood became a fact of prime importance. That century and a half of apprenticeship in Democracy stimulated self-help, while it also necessitated helpfulness for others and mutual dependence upon them. Not without reason did "help" take the place of "servant" in our vocabulary. But the conditions of life led to other results that left less salutary effects behind them. They bred a habit of contentment with what would *do*, as we say, rather than an impatience of whatever was not best; a readiness to put up with many evils or inconveniences, because they could not be helped; and this has, especially

in our politics, conduced to the growth of the greatest weakness in our American character—the acquiescence in makeshifts and abuses which can and ought to be helped, and which, with honest resolution, might be helped.

Certainly never were the auguries so favorable as when our Republic was founded, a republic sure from inherent causes to broaden into a more popular form. But while the equality of which I have been speaking existed in the instincts, the habits, and obscurely in the consciousness of all, it was latent and inert. It found little occasion for self-assertion, none for aggression, and was slow to invent one. A century ago there was still a great respect for authority in all its manifestations; for the law first of all, for age, for learning, and for experience. The community recognized and followed its natural leaders, and it was these who framed our Constitution, perhaps the most remarkable monument of political wisdom known to history. The convention which framed it was composed of the choicest material in the community, and was led astray by no theories of what *might* be good, but clave closely to what experience had demonstrated to *be* good. The late M. Guizot once asked me “how long I thought our Republic would endure.” I replied: “So long as the ideas of the men who founded it continue dominant,” and he assented. I will not say that we could not find among us now the constituents of as able an assembly, but I doubt if there be a single person in this audience who believes that with our present political methods we should or could elect them. We have revived the English system of rotten boroughs, under which the electors indeed return the candidate, but it is a handful of men, too often one man, that selects the person to be so returned. If this be so, and I think it is so, it should give us matter for very serious reflection.

After our Constitution got fairly into working order it



really seemed as if we had invented a machine that would go of itself, and this begot a faith in our luck which even the Civil War itself but momentarily disturbed. Circumstances continued favorable, and our prosperity went on increasing. I admire the splendid complacency of my countrymen, and find something exhilarating and inspiring in it. We are a nation which has *struck ile*, but we are also a nation that is sure the well will never run dry. And this confidence in our luck, with the absorption in material interests, generated by unparalleled opportunity, has in some respects made us neglectful of our political duties. I have long thought that the average men of our Revolutionary period were better grounded in the elementary principles of government than their descendants. The town-meeting was then a better training-school than the caucus and the convention are now, and the smaller the community the greater the influence of the better mind in it. In looking about me, I am struck with the fact that while we produce great captains, financial and industrial leaders in abundance, and political managers in over-abundance, there seems to be a pause in the production of leaders in statesmanship. I am still more struck with the fact that my newspaper often gives me fuller reports of the speeches of Prince Bismarck and of Mr. Gladstone than of any thing said in Congress. If M. Thiers or M. Gambetta were still here it would be the same with them ; but France, like ourselves, has gone into the manufacture of small politicians. Why are we interested in what these men say ? Because they are important for what they *are* as well as for what they represent. They are Somebodies, and their every word gathers force from the character and life behind it. They stand for an idea as well as for a constituency. An adequate amount of small change will give us the equivalent of the largest piece of money, but what aggregate of little men will

amount to a single great one, that most precious coinage of the mint of nature? It is not that we have lost the power of bringing forth great men. They are not the product of institutions, though these may help or hinder them. I am thankful to have been the contemporary of one and among the greatest, of whom I think it is safe to say that no other country and no other form of government could have fashioned him, and whom posterity will recognize as the wisest and most bravely human of modern times. It is a benediction to have lived in the same age and in the same country with Abraham Lincoln.

Had Democracy borne only this consummate flower and then perished like the century-plant, it would have discharged its noblest function. It is the crown of a nation, one might almost say the chief duty of a nation, to produce great men, for without them its history is but the annals of ants and bees. Two conditions are essential—the man and the opportunity. We must wait on Mother Nature for the one, but in America we ourselves can do much to make or mar the other. We cannot always afford to set our house on fire as we did for Lincoln, but we are certainly responsible if the door to distinction be made so narrow and so low as to admit only petty and crouching men.

A Democracy makes certain duties incumbent on every citizen which under other forms of government are limited to a man or to a class of men. A prudent despot looks after his kingdom as a prudent private man would look after his estate; in an aristocratic republic a delegated body of nobles manages public affairs as a board of railroad directors would manage the property committed to their charge; in both cases, self-interest is strong enough to call forth every latent energy of character and intellect; in both cases the individual is so consciously important a factor as to insure a sense of personal responsibility. In the ancient democracies

a citizen could see and feel the effect of his own vote. But in a democracy so vast as ours, though the responsibility be as great (I remember an election in which the governor of a State was chosen by a majority of one vote), yet the infinitesimal division of power wellnigh nullifies the sense of it, and of the responsibility implied in it. It is certainly a great privilege to have a direct share in the government of one's country, but it is a privilege which is of advantage to the commonwealth only in proportion as it is intelligently exercised. Then, indeed, its constant exercise should train the faculties of forethought and judgment better, and should give men a keener sense of their own value than perhaps any thing else can do. But under every form of representative government, parties become necessary for the marshalling and expression of opinion, and, when parties are once formed, those questions the discussion of which would discipline and fortify men's minds tend more and more to pass out of sight, and the topics that interest their prejudices and passions to become more absorbing. What will be of immediate advantage to the party is the first thing considered, what of permanent advantage to their country the last. I refer especially to neither of the great parties which divide the country. I am treating a question of natural history. Both parties have been equally guilty, both have evaded, as successfully as they could, the living questions of the day. As the parties have become more evenly balanced, the difficulty of arriving at their opinions has been greater in proportion to the difficulty of devising any profession of faith meaningless enough not to alarm, if it could not be so interpreted as to conciliate, the varied and sometimes conflicting interests of the different sections of the country. If you asked them, as *Captain Standard* in Farquahar's comedy asks *Parley*, "Have you any principles?" the answer, like his, would have been "Five hundred." Between the two a



conscientious voter feels as the traveller of fifty years ago felt between the touters of the two rival hotels in the village where the stage-coach stopped for dinner. Each side deafened him with depreciation of the other establishment till his only conclusion was that each was worse than the other, and that it mattered little at which of them he paid dearly for an indigestion. When I say that I make no distinctions between the two parties, I must be allowed to make one exception. I mean the attempt by a portion of the Republicans to utilize passions, which every true lover of his country should do his best to allay, by provoking into virulence again the happily quiescent animosities of our Civil War. In saying this I do not forget that the Democratic Party was quite as efficient in bringing that war upon us as the seceding States themselves. Nor do I forget that it was by the same sacrifice of general and permanent interests to the demands of immediate partisan advantage which is the besetting temptation of all parties. Let bygones be bygones. Yet, I may say in passing that there was something profoundly comic in the spectacle of a great party, with an heroic past behind it, stating that its policy would be to prevent some unknown villains from doing something very wicked more than twenty years ago.

Parties being necessary things, it follows of course that there must be politicians to manage and leaders to represent and symbolize them. The desire of man to see his wishes, his prejudices, his aspirations, summed up and personified in a single representative, has the permanence of an instinct. Few escape it, few are conscious of its controlling influence. The danger always is that loyalty to the man shall insensibly replace loyalty to the thing he is supposed to represent, till at last the question *what* he represents fades wholly out of mind. The love of victory as a good in itself is also a powerful ingredient in the temperament of most men. Forty



odd years ago it would have been hard to find a man, no matter how wicked he may have believed the Mexican War to be, who could suppress a feeling of elation when the news of Buena Vista arrived. Never mind the principle involved, it was our side that won.

If the dangers and temptations of parties be such as I have indicated, and I do not think that I have overstated them, it is for the interest of the best men in both parties that there should be a neutral body, not large enough to form a party by itself, nay, which would lose its power for good if it attempted to form such a party, and yet large enough to moderate between both, and to make both more cautious in their choice of candidates and in their connivance with evil practices. If the politicians must look after the parties, there should be somebody to look after the politicians, somebody to ask disagreeable questions and to utter uncomfortable truths; somebody to make sure, if possible, before election, not only what, but whom the candidate, if elected, is going to represent. What to me is the saddest feature of our present methods is the pitfalls which they dig in the path of ambitious and able men who feel that they are fitted for a political career, that by character and training they could be of service to their country, yet who find every avenue closed to them unless at the sacrifice of the very independence which gives them a claim to what they seek. As in semi-barbarous times the sincerity of a converted Jew was tested by forcing him to swallow pork, so these are required to gulp without a wry face what is as nauseous to them. I would do all in my power to render such loathsome compliances unnecessary. The pity of it is that with our political methods the hand is of necessity subdued to what it works in. It has been proved, I think, that the old parties are not to be reformed from within. It is from without that the attempt must be made, and it is the

Independents who must make it. If the attempt should fail, the failure of the experiment of democracy would inevitably follow.

But I do not believe that it will fail. The signs are all favorable. Already there are journals in every part of the country—journals, too, among the first in ability, circulation, and influence—which refuse to wear the colors of party. Already the people have a chance of hearing the truth, and I think that they always gladly hear it. Our first aim should be, as it has been, the reform of our civil service, for that is the fruitful mother of all our ills. It is the most aristocratic system in the world, for it depends on personal favor and is the reward of personal service, and the power of the political boss is built up and maintained, like that of the mediæval robber baron, by his freehandedness in distributing the property of other people. From it is derived the notion that the public treasure is a fund to a share of which every one is entitled who by fraud or favor can get it, and from this again the absurd doctrine of rotation in office so that each may secure his proportion, and that the business of the nation may be carried on by a succession of apprentices who are dismissed just as they are getting an inkling of their trade to make room for others who are in due time to be turned loose on the world, passed masters in nothing but incompetence for any useful career. From this, too, has sprung the theory of the geographical allotment of patronage, as if ability were dependent, like wheat, upon the soil, and the more mischievous one that members of Congress must be residents of the district that elects them, a custom which has sometimes excluded men of proved ability, in the full vigor of their faculties and the ripeness of their experience, from the councils of the nation. All reforms seem slow and wearisome to their advocates, for these are commonly of that ardent and imaginative temper which inaccu-

rately foreshortens the distance and overlooks the difficulties between means and end. If we have not got all that we hoped from the present administration, we have perhaps got more than we had reason to expect, considering how widely spread are the roots of this evil, and what an inconvenient habit they have of sending up suckers in the most unexpected places. To cut off these does not extirpate them. It is the parent tree that must go. It is much that we have compelled a discussion of the question from one end of the country to the other, for it cannot bear discussion, and I for one have so much faith in the good sense of the American people as to feel sure that discussion means victory. That the Independents are so heartily denounced by those who support and are supported by the system that has been gradually perfected during the last fifty years, is an excellent symptom. We must not be impatient. Some of us can remember when those who are now the canonized saints of the party which restored the Union and abolished slavery were a forlorn hope of Mugwumps, the scorn of all practical politicians. Sydney Smith was fond of saying that the secret of happiness in life was to take short views, and in this he was but repeating the rule of the Greek and Roman poets, to live in every hour as if we were never to have another. But he who would be happy as a reformer must take long views, and into distances sometimes that baffle the most piercing vision.

Two great questions have been opened anew by the President: reduction of revenue and the best means of effecting it, and these really resolve themselves into one, that of the War Tariff. I say of the War Tariff because it is a mere electioneering device to call it a question of protection or free trade pure and simple. I shall barely allude to them as briefly as possible, for they will be amply discussed before the people by more competent men than I. I can-



not help thinking that both are illustrations of the truth that it is a duty of statesmen to study tendencies and probable consequences much rather than figures, which can as easily be induced to fight impartially on both sides as the *condottieri* of four centuries ago. All that reasonable men contend for now is the reduction of the tariff in such a way as shall be least hurtful to existing interests, most helpful to the consumer, and above all as shall practically test the question whether we are better off when we get our raw material at the lowest possible prices. I think the advocates of protection have been unwise and are beginning to see that they were unwise in shifting the ground of debate. They have set many people to asking whether robbing Peter to pay Paul be a method equally economical for both parties, and whether the bad policy of it be not all the more flagrant in proportion as the Peters are many and the Pauls few? Whether the Pauls of every variety be not inevitably forced into an alliance offensive and defensive against the Peters and sometimes with very questionable people? Whether if we are taxed for the payment of a bounty to the owner of a silver mine, we should not be equally taxed to make a present to the owner of wheat fields, cotton fields, tobacco fields, hay fields, which are the most productive gold mines of the country? Whether the case of protection be not like that of armored ships, requiring ever thicker plating as the artillery of competition is perfected? But the tendency of excessive protection which thoughtful men dread most, is that it stimulates an unhealthy home competition leading to over-production and to the disasters which are its tainted offspring; that it fosters over-population, and this of the most helpless class when thrown out of employment; that it engenders smuggling, false invoices, and other demoralizing practices; that the principle which is its root is the root also of Rings, and Syndicates, and Trusts, and all other such conspiracies for the artificial raising of profits in the interest of classes

and minorities. I confess I cannot take a cheerful view of the future of that New England I love so well when her leading industries shall be gradually drawn to the South, as they infallibly will be, by the greater cheapness of labor there. It is not pleasant to hear that called the American System which has succeeded in abolishing our commercial marine. It is even less pleasant to hear it advocated as being for the interest of the laborer by men who imported cheaper labor till it was forbidden by law. The true American system is that which produces the best *men* by letting them as much as possible to their own resources. That protection has been the cause of our material prosperity is refuted by the passage I have already quoted from Burke. Though written when our farmers' wives and daughters did most of our spinning and weaving, one would take it for a choice flower of protection eloquence. We have prospered in spite of artificial obstacles that would have baffled a people less energetic and less pliant to opportunity. The so-called American System, the system, that is, of selfish exclusion and monopoly, is no invention of ours, but has been borrowed of the mediæval guilds. It has had nothing to do with the raising of wages, for these are always higher in localities where the demand for labor is greater than the supply. And if the measure of wages be their purchasing power, what does the workman gain, unless it be the pleasure of spending more money, under a system, which, if it pay more money in the hire of hands, enhances the prices of what that money will buy in more than equal proportion?

Of the surplus in the Treasury I will only say that it has already shown itself to be an invitation to every possible variety of wasteful expenditure and therefore of demoralizing jobbery, and that it has again revived those theories of grandmotherly government which led to our revolt from the mother country, are most hostile to the genius of our institutions and soonest sap the energy and corrode the morals of a people.

It is through its politics, through its capacity for government, the noblest of all sciences, that a nation proves its right to a place among the other beneficent forces of nature. For politics permeate more widely than any other force and reach every one of us, soon or late, to teach or to debauch. We are confronted with new problems and new conditions. We and the population which is to solve them are very unlike that of fifty years ago. As I was walking not long ago in the Boston Public Garden, I saw two Irishmen looking at Ball's equestrian statue of Washington, and wondering who was the personage thus commemorated. I had been brought up among the still living traditions of Lexington, Concord, Bunker's Hill, and the siege of Boston. To these men Ireland was still their country, and America a place to get their daily bread. This put me upon thinking. What, then, is patriotism, and what its true value to a man? Was it merely an unreasoning and almost cat-like attachment to certain square miles of the earth's surface, made up in almost equal parts of lifelong association, hereditary tradition, and parochial prejudice? This is the narrowest and most provincial form, as it is also, perhaps, the strongest, of that passion or virtue, whichever we choose to call it. But did it not fulfil the essential condition of giving men an ideal outside themselves, which would awaken in them capacities for devotion and heroism that are deaf even to the penetrating cry of self? All the moral good of which patriotism is the fruitful mother my two Irishmen had in abundant measure, and it had wrought in them marvels of fidelity and self-sacrifice which made me blush for the easier terms on which my own duties of the like kind were habitually fulfilled. Were they not daily pinching themselves that they might pay their tribute to the old hearthstone or the old cause three thousand miles away? If tears tingle our eyes when we read of the like loyalty in the clansmen of the attainted and exiled Lochiel, shall this leave us unmoved?



I laid the lesson to heart. I would, in my own way, be as faithful as they to what I believed to be the best interests of my country. Our politicians are so busy studying the local eddies of prejudice or interest that they allow the main channel of our national energies to be obstructed by dams for the grinding of private grist. Our leaders no longer lead, but are as skilful as Indians in following the faintest trail of public opinion. I find it generally admitted that our moral standard in politics has been lowered, and is every day going lower. Some attribute this to our want of a leisure-class. It is to a book of the Apocrypha that we are indebted for the invention of the Man of Leisure.\* But a leisure-class without a definite object in life, and without generous aims, is a bane rather than a blessing. It would end in the weariness and cynical pessimism in which its great exemplar Ecclesiastes ended, without leaving us the gift which his genius left. What we want is an active class who will insist in season and out of season that we shall have a country whose greatness is measured not only by its square miles, its number of yards woven, of hogs packed, of bushels of wheat raised, not only by its skill to feed and clothe the body, but also by its power to feed and clothe the soul; a country which shall be as great morally as it is materially; a country whose very name shall not only, as now it does, stir us as with the sound of a trumpet, but shall call out all that is best within us by offering us the radiant image of something better and nobler, and more enduring than we, of something that shall fulfil our own thwarted aspiration, when we are but a handful of forgotten dust in the soil trodden by a race whom we shall have helped to make more worthy of their inheritance than we ourselves had the power, I might almost say, the means to be.

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\* "The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure, and he that hath little business shall become wise."—ECCLESIASTICUS xxxviii., 24.





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